



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
FAMILY INDEPENDENCE AGENCY  
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW  
DIRECTOR

February 15, 2005

Jeff Hadden, Editorial Page Editor  
Detroit News  
615 W. Lafayette  
Detroit, MI 48826

Dear Mr. Hadden,

Your February 13 story by Mike Martindale and Amy Lee about the Oakland County prosecutor and the Family Independence Agency failed to present an accurate picture of the goals or actions of the FIA in our efforts to protect children in our state. Your follow up editorial was much more balanced and recognized that, although our two offices often come from different perspectives, we have the same goal—to protect children.

The FIA's primary child protective services goal is to ensure the safety of our state's children. Keeping children safe is the mission and purpose of every child protective services worker, every day of the year.

I absolutely believe that the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office is also focused on the safety and well being of children, as are prosecutors throughout the state. The article implied that our agencies are somehow working in opposition, when in truth both agencies play critical roles—along with families, communities, and the courts—in keeping children safe.

Our practice at the FIA is based on extensive national research on child well being, which tells us children do best in their own home, with their own family. Indeed, that is why federal and state laws *require* the FIA to first make all reasonable efforts to keep children safe *in their own home* before recommending removal. Of course there are times when children cannot be safe in their homes. In those cases, we do not hesitate to petition the court for removal of the children.

Unnecessary removals can be enormously damaging to children, creating lifelong problems. When we listen to children in our system, they consistently tell us they want us to help their parents, not send them away. Again—there are times when concerns for a child's safety make this impossible, but we must view removal from the home as a tool, not the rule.

The cases cited in the Detroit News story are all terrible tragedies. They represent the caseworkers' worst nightmare. In every case where we have been involved and a child has been seriously harmed by a caregiver, we examine everything that we have done as an agency, and every individual involved in that case reassesses every decision they have made to see if the tragedy could have been averted.

As we reflect on these tragic cases, it is also important to keep in mind the thousands of children who have been able to live safely at home with services we have provided. These children have been able to grow up with some stability and continuity in their lives, rather than facing the trauma of dislocation and the grief over the loss of a family.

We remain committed to a close working relationship with the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office and prosecutors throughout the state as we share the mission to help assure the safety and well being of Michigan's children.

Sincerely,

Marianne Udow  
Director, Family Independence Agency